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ABSTRACT

This paper explores enrollment for foreign language programs (FLPs) in French, Spanish, and German using data collected from students in Grades 7 through 12 in the Grand Blanc Community School District (Michigan) for the 1987-88, 1988-89, 1989-90, 1990-91, and 1992-93 school years. Research questions address: (1) enrollment figures, (2) loss rates for each year by language and by level, and (3) reasons students cite for dropping out of FLPs. From stratified attrition lists from the 1990-91 school year, randomly selected students from each language and level were surveyed, and their responses were used to develop student attitude surveys geared toward high school and middle school foreign language students. A search of student records enrolled in foreign language at both the middle and high school level was completed for years 1987-88, 1988-89, 1989-90, 1990-91, and 1991-92. Students were identified either as having continued or dropped out of the program at one of five stages, were sampled within each stage and asked to complete the student attitude survey. Results show that enrollment in foreign language in Grand Blanc at first declined, but increased over the past 2 years. The increase occurred in both the actual number of students and in the percentage of the student population. The highest attrition rates for all three languages occurred after the third level of high school foreign language study, suggesting that students are fulfilling that language requirement in high school and then dropping it as soon as they have. The lowest attrition level occurs after the 8th grade level. For middle school students, the top reason for discontinuing foreign language study was that they had to choose between the foreign language and another class they also wanted. For high school students, the top reason high school students gave was that they were no longer interested in taking it. Students attitude surveys are appended. (Contains 20 references.) (JP)

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FOREIGN LANGUAGE ENROLLMENT and the ATTRITION RATES in the GRAND BLANC COMMUNITY SCHOOLS

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EAD 855

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I. INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Statement of the Problem

Erratic enrollment rates in foreign language programs has been and, continues to be, a common problem for school district's offering foreign language instruction. It is a problem which teachers in such programs are often called upon to explain and correct if they have a desire to see the program, and their job, continue.

Not surprisingly, the explanations typically focus on either the economic situation of the school district or some degree of support by the administration. Excuses like, "The principal is against foreign languages" or "There isn't enough money in the budget." are echoed throughout many districts. Any cuts to the program, despite being economically and administatively sound, are often miscontrued as a lack of support. Also criticized for their lack of support are guidance counselors who, in fulfilling the obligations of their job, are sometimes falsely accused of discouraging students from pursuing foreign languages in order to "protect the gradepoint".

Others blame new course offerings and graduation requirements in other subject areas for "stealing" away potential foreign language students. This sets up a climate in which teachers feel the need to "compete" for

their share of the total student population. Active, aggressive recruitment, therefore, is not uncommon. These teachers reason that by recruiting a larger segment of the total population into the first year of foreign language study, they can counteract what they perceive as lack of support by both the counselors and the administration. They further reason that a program which has a large percentage of the student population enrolled in it will have a far better chance of escaping the "budget ax". Included in that thinking, naturally, is the concern over job security.

Despite successful recruiting efforts at the first year level, very few students actually reach the advanced levels in their study of foreign language. With attrition rates frequently exceeding 30 and 40% per year, what may start out as a fairly substantial pool of first year foreign language students, ends up being less than one dozen by the end of the traditional four or five year cycle.

Attempts to improve the situation usually means even more aggressive recruitment efforts will take place. Despite, being able to get students into the program, enrollment figures continue to drop at alarming rates. It is well past time for teachers to cease asking themselves, "How can I get more students interested in studying foreign

languages?" and begin asking, "How can I keep those students who have already enrolled in the program?"

This study will explore the answer as it relates to the foreign language program within the Grand Blanc Community School District. The Grand Blanc Community School district is a predominately white, middle class suburban area 8 miles south of Flint, Michigan. District enrollment in 1992-1993 was approximately 5,440. There is one middle school, grades 6 through 8, with approximately 1,300 students and one high school, grades 9 through 12, with just over 1700 students.

Currently, the foreign language program in Grand Blanc Community School begins at the 6th grade level. Sixth grade students receive nine (9) weeks of either French or Spanish. No choice is given as to which language students will receive in this exploratory course, rather students remain at "the mercy of the computer" for their assignment.

Beginning in the 7th grade, students can elect to take a full year of either French, German, or Spanish. As eighth graders, students may continue their study and, if successful, will complete the equivalent of the first year of high school foreign language study while at the middle school. Students successfully completing both the 7th and 8th grade foreign language classes can, with teacher recommendation,

enter directly into the second year at the high school level, thus allowing students to take a maximum of five years of foreign language instruction.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is twofold: First, it will identify and assess the enrollment and attrition rates of the foreign language program for the Grand Blanc Community School District. The primary concern of the assessment is to identify the percentage of students lost and to determine at which levels the highest rate of attrition is occurring.

The second goal of this study is to determine the reasons for such a high rate of attrition and to see if these reasons vary according to the level of completed foreign language study. Once the reasons for attrition are known, the development, and subsequent implementation, of appropriate corrective measures can take place within the district.

Definition of Terms

1. Attrition rate: the percentage of students who chose not to continue to study a foreign language after having taken at least one year of it.

2. Drop-out: a student who withdraws from a class at any time between the fourth Friday count and the last day of the school year.

3. Enrollment: the number of students enrolled on finalized class lists after the official fourth Friday count.

4. Mott Middle College: an alternative educational choice for students who are having difficulty succeeding in the regular public school system.

5. Target Language. Target language refers to the foreign language being studied, not the person's native language.

6. W/T (Withdrawn/Truant: refers to the term used for students who have dropped out of school entirely or were expelled from the district.

Delimitations of this Study.

1. The results of this research are confined to the population studied.
2. Some student names were recorded in grade books by their foreign language nickname instead of their first name. While the appropriate foreign language teacher was consulted in an attempt to identify the students' accurate English name, a few students with common last names may have be confused.
3. The study is based on the "Student Attitudes Surveys" that were developed. The reliability and validity of these surveys was not tested.
4. In the case of the high school results, classroom teachers were permitted to prevent students from attending the survey session. Forty-five students out of 158 did not take the survey.

Assumptions

For the purposes of this research the following assumptions have been made:

1. Student drop-out rates are a negative indicator of student achievement and program success.
2. Increased enrollment rates are a positive indicator of program success.

Assumptions (continued)

3. The responses given by students on the "Student Attitudes Surveys" were honest.
4. The responses of the sample population on the "Student Attitudes Survey" are representative of the student foreign language drop-outs for the past five years.

Hypotheses/Questions

This study was designed to investigate the foreign language enrollment and attrition rates in the Grand Blanc Community Schools during the 1987-88, 1988-89, 1989-90, 1990-91, and 1992-93 school years. The results of the following specific questions will be discussed in this paper: (1) What are the enrollment figures in foreign language in Grand Blanc Community Schools during the last five years? (2) What are the "loss rates" for each year by language and by level? and (3) What are the reasons students give most frequently for dropping out of foreign language?

It is my hope that the answers to these questions provide me, and the foreign language teachers within my district, sufficient background so a plan of action can be developed. Without the development of such a plan of action, this study, I believe, will serve only as a means by which future decline can be projected.

II. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

In retrospect, the history of foreign language programs in the United States has been inconsistent. The changing degree of public concern over the success of the United States in the international marketplace as well as concerns over national security has contributed to this inconsistency.

Not surprisingly, it was this concern over national security in the 1940's and during World War II which rekindled the interest in foreign language study. (Pesola; Anderson, 1988) While this renewed interest in foreign language did encourage many schools to begin and/or enhance existing foreign language programs, it was not a sustained effort. When the war ended so did much of the interest.

The launching of Sputnik in 1957, and the subsequent passage of the National Defense Act of 1958, not only rejuvenated the interest in foreign language study but provided federal funding to assist schools in the establishment of such programs. As might be expected, the number of students taking foreign language between 1958 and 1965 went from 16% to a dramatic 26%. (Geno, 1980)

This sudden surge of popularity for foreign language programs in the 1960s proved to be short-lived as many

districts "jumped the gun" and launched programs before setting rationale and goals. (Pesola; Anderson, 1988) As a consequence, many programs gained public support for the wrong reasons: "catching up" with the Russians, taking advantage of government money available, providing a program to compete with neighboring schools, and trying to produce fluent speakers quickly. Many administrators, parents, and teachers had unrealistic expectations of student performance. Those districts who climbed on the bandwagon for the wrong reasons soon found themselves disappointed. Disillusionment and lack of clear direction combined to bring an end to programs that had been too hastily begun. The decline of students enrolled in foreign language from 24.8% in 1968 to 23.3% in 1970 and 18.4% in 1974 bears witness to this fact. (Geno, 1980)

Additional evidence can be found in studies done at the state level in Indiana, New York, and Tennesee. In Indiana, between 1967 and 1977, enrollment dropped from 30.2% to 22.2%. (Geno, 1980) Similarly, enrollments in New York dropped from 36.3% to 33.6% between 1974 and 1977 (Scebold, 1980) while Tennessee reported a drop of 29.3% to 19.8% between 1967 and 1978 (Campana, 1980).

Further decline in the number of students taking foreign language continued into the early 1980s. A

survey conducted by The American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages reported that number of students taking a foreign language has dropped to 19% (ACTFL Reports, 1982). The following year, a survey by Education Week magazine, found only 15% of all high school students enrolled in foreign languages. (Sheppard, 1983)

Although education in foreign language studies at this time hit an all time low, credit for its subsequent revival goes to various studies and commissions. Highlighting the need for foreign language opportunities began with the appearance of Strength Through Wisdom, the report of the President's Commission on Foreign Language and International Studies (1979). Additional publications such as The Tongue-Tied American: Confronting the Foreign Language Crisis (Simon, 1980) as well as A Nation at Risk in 1983, also renewed interest in foreign languages and brought about noticeable program changes.

A survey undertaken by the Council of Chief State Officers and the National Council on Foreign Languages and International Studies, reported foreign languages as being more important in 1983 than at any point since 1969.

Today's increased growth in foreign language study, particularly at the elementary level, adds credibility to that claim. Many states, including North Carolina,

Illinois, Wisconsin, Maryland and Ohio, are reporting increased enrollment in elementary and high school foreign language classes (Rhodes, 1983; Dandonoll, 1987; MLA Reports, 1988). While it appears the tide may be changing and the most difficult years behind us, studies continue to indicate that even in schools where relatively many students are enrolled in foreign language classes, very few are enrolled in advanced classes. (MLA Reports, 1961; Schwartz, 1981; Keyes, 1978; Bryant, 1978; Myers, 1979, Miller, 1975)

One reason for the high drop-out rates may be unrealistic expectations by students. (Myers, 1979; Bryant, 1978; Keyes, 1978) Students, according to Dr. Paul Schwartz of the University of North Dakota, enroll in foreign language courses because they "expect it to be fun" or because they have future travel plans. (Schwartz, 1981) For these students the need for learning a foreign language is not a strong one. Keeping them in the program might require efforts at increasing their motivational levels or the development of a survey or "survival skill only" language class. The development of such a course also makes the department more attractive to lower ability students. (Sims, 1981)

Unrealistic teacher expectations might be another reason for the high attrition rates in foreign language.

This may be due to the insistence upon "uniform achievement of all students at each level, with no accomodation of individual differences in the rate of learning." (Torres, 1985) Accustomed to teaching only the "more able", college-bound, high achieving students, foreign language programs cope with slower, less able students by allowing them to drop out. (Sandstrom, 1970) Grade point and teacher recommendation restrictions also further discriminate and discourage these students.

While some foreign language teachers believe in and support this practice, many others feel foreign language could and should be available to all students. Deeply held philosophical differences between those who view foreign language study for all students and the "language elitists" continues to spur heated controversy. More importantly, such strong philosophical differences, when represented within a single department, can lead to wide differences in teacher expectations. (Muller, 1985) This may, ultimately, confuse and discourage students from further study.

Increased graduation requirements, particularly in other subject matters, might also be another reason why students chose to discontinue their foreign language study. (Met, 1991) As schools adopt additional requirements for graduation in the areas of science, social studies, and

computer education, potential foreign language students will find their elective choices increasingly limited. Unless steps are taken to increase students' interest and motivation and/or better match both teacher and student expectations, foreign language programs will continue to suffer. (Myers, 1979; Bryant, 1978; Keyes, 1978, Schwartz, 1981)

Lack of practical use of the foreign language may also help explain the large number of students electing to drop from the program. (Sims, 1981) Many of the audiolingual and grammar/translation methods introduced in the 1950's are still in practice today. These methods of teaching foreign languages bore and discourage today's students. Foreign language students in the 1990's are more interested in "using" the language, not just learning about it. (Krashen, 1984) Programs which are not currently in the process of, or have not yet, switched to a proficiency focus, will continue to see their enrollment numbers decline.

III. DESIGN & METHODOLOGY

The primary purpose of this study is to determine the enrollment and attrition figures in the 7-12th grade foreign language program within the Grand Blanc School District for the 1987-88, 1988-89, 1989-90, 1990-91, and 1991-92 school years. In June, 1991 in-house permission to remove the 1987-88, 1988-89, 1989-90 and 1990-91 grade boks of all the foreign language teachers was sought and received by central administration and both the middle and high school building principals. A search of the records at the both the middle and high schools was conducted.

During the month of August, 1991, enrollment lists for each grade, language, and year were developed using the official teacher grade books. The master lists contained the names of students enrolled in each language, at each level for every year included as part of this study.

Beginning with the 1987-88 school year, student names on each of the master lists was compared with the student names on the appropriate subsequent year's master list to determine if, and when, the individual dropped from the foreign language program. Names appearing on the 1987-1988, 7th grade, French students' list, for example, were compared to the 1988-1989, 8th grade, French students' list. Student names not appearing on both lists were

defined as having "dropped" from the program. Those students identified as "drop-outs" from the program, made up a second set of lists, called "attrition lists". Names appearing on the "attrition lists" were then stratified according to the level at which the foreign language study was discontinued, beginning with the 7th grade level and ending with high school level three. The sixth grade enrollees were not included due to the exploratory nature of the course and the lack of student choice for enrollment. The fourth and fifth years at the high school were excluded due to the expected attrition rates of seniors graduating from the program. Students moving away from the district were also excluded from the study.

Using the stratified lists from the 1990-1991 school year, 15% of the student drop-outs for each language and level were randomly selected and asked to respond to a phone survey in which they were asked their reasons for discontinuing their foreign language study. A list was made from their responses and used to develop two "Student Attitude Surveys" (see Appendices A & B). The first survey was geared towards high school students as their responses to the phone survey seemed to indicate graduation requirements played a larger role in their decision to discontinue their foreign language study. The second survey was

developed for middle school foreign language students.

While the original proposal called for each survey to be numbered and sent through the mail to each individual along with a postage-paid envelope, turnover in the Superintendent, Assistant Superintendent, and Middle School Principal positions along with budgetary cuts (affecting postage) forced a change in the survey process.

To reduce the cost of the survey process only the most recent drop-outs (most of whom were still attending classes within the district) were approved by the new district administrators for participation in the study. Using the stratified lists for the 1991-1992 school year, students appearing on these lists were asked to report to a common survey location on a given day. Building principals, counselors, and parent volunteers verified the students' name upon arrival and then gave that student a survey coded to correspond to the language and last completed level of study. Building principals then explained to students the significance and purpose of the survey and asked them to complete it. Students who were absent and/or did not report were asked to report the next day or were called down by their counselors later in the week.

Instrumentation

Two similar instruments were developed for middle and high school levels with variations to reflect the different levels of instruction and cognitive ability of the students (see Appendices A & B). These "Student Attitudes Surveys" were developed by the researcher for the specific purpose of determining the reason(s) why students discontinue their foreign language study.

Each "Student Attitudes Survey" consisted of two parts. The first part asked respondents to provide basic demographic data such as age, gender, race, class standing, and educational aspirations. Although this information was not the focus of this study, a future study comparing attrition rates to this demographic information will take place. Including the questions on this survey will save the district time and expense.

The second half of the survey consisted of statements designed to identify the prevailing factors for attrition. These statements were meant to examine the impact of teacher expectations, student motivation, new course offerings, increased graduation requirements, insistence on uniform achievement levels, lack of practical use of the foreign language, and student expectations.

Prior to the development of the second half of the

Instrumentation (continued)

survey, a total of 66 students (15% from each level being studied) were interviewed. The purpose of these interviews was to validate the literature and to check for the inclusion of all possible attrition factors. Responses given by students and not spoken to in the literature were, of course, used in the design of the two instruments.

The "Student Attitudes Survey" were designed for ease of response, with wide margins and easy-to-read type. It was then administered to the same 66 students who were interviewed to check for clarity and length of time needed for response. Any necessary changes were made before the final survey was printed and administered to the entire sample population.

Sample Population

A search of records was conducted to identify those students who were enrolled in foreign language at both the middle and high school level in the district for the school years 1987-88, 88-89, 89-90, 90-91, and 1991-92. Because the middle school does not maintain records further back than five years, 1987-88 was selected as the cut off date. Only students attending the Grand Blanc schools during the entire period of the study were included.

Sample Population (continued)

These students were identified as either having continued or dropped out of the program at five stages: after seventh grade, after eighth grade, after first year high school; after second year high school; and after third year high school. Once matched to one of these five stages, students included in the study were sampled within each stage and asked to complete a Student Attitudes Survey.

Sampling within each stage allowed for better comparison between stages by enabling the researcher to see if any of the reasons given are stronger at any given level than at another. The researcher believes this will ultimately allow the district to develop sound corrective measures appropriate for each stage.

IV. DATA ANALYSIS

Enrollment

What were the enrollment figures in foreign language in the Grand Blanc Community Schools during the last five years? To answer this question, the researcher conducted a search of the records for the years 1987-88, 1988-89, 1989-90, 1990-91, 1991-92, and 1992-1993. Data shows that in the years studied, enrollment in foreign language in Grand Blanc at first declined, but has increased over the

Enrollment (continued)

past two years. This increase has occurred both in the actual number of students and in the percentage of the student population. (See Figure 1: K-12 Foreign Language Enrollment 1987-1993)

FIGURE #1: K-12 Foreign Language Enrollment 1987-93

	87-88	88-89	89-90	90-91	91-92	92-93
French - Elem.	0	0	0	0	0	0
French - M.S.	440	362	349	311	392	452
French - H.S.	296	285	264	251	272	324
Total French	736	647	613	562	664	776
German - Elem.	0	0	0	0	0	0
German - M.S.	48	42	21	0	0	0
German - H.S.	97	93	76	58	57	16
Total German	145	135	97	58	57	16
Spanish - Elem.	0	0	0	0	90	535
Spanish - M.S.	358	466	454	443	483	488
Spanish - H.S.	357	336	292	323	369	515
Total Spanish	715	802	746	766	942	1,538
Total All Languages	1,596	1,584	1,456	1,386	1,663	2,330

As one can see in Figure #1, foreign language enrollment K-12 in the 1987-88 school year was 1,596 out of a district total of 5,571 or approximately 29% of the total student population. In 1988-89 some 1,584 students were enrolled in foreign language out of 5,501 maintaining 29% of the total student population. The number of students enrolled in foreign language fell to 1,456 (out of 5,509) or 26% in 1989-90 and fell even further in 1990-91 to 1,386 (out of 5,453) or 25% of the student population.

In 1991-92, Grand Blanc Community School became involved in an elementary foreign language pilot program. Ninety students were a part of this study and while the totals in Figure #1 include these ninety students, the discussion here will not. Student enrollment in foreign language during the 1991-92 school year saw an increase to 1,573 (1,663 - 90 pilot students) out of a district total of 5,408 or 29% (31% including pilot students).

In 1992-93, middle and high school foreign language enrollment climbed to 1,795 (2,330 - 535 elementary foreign language students) out of 5,439 or 33% of the total student population.

While we prefer to believe this increase in foreign language enrollment is due to changes the department has made in teaching methodology, specifically the introduction

of a more proficiency/outcome based approach, it may simply be the result of an increased revival in foreign language study.

Attrition Rates

Unquestionably, in recent years we have been exposing more students to a foreign language but, after being exposed to the foreign language, are these students continuing their foreign language study? Are fewer "dropping out"? What are the attrition rates in foreign language in the Grand Blanc Community Schools? To answer these questions, the researcher used the grade books to first develop enrollment lists for each year of the study. Names on those lists were then compared to the next year's list in order to locate students who dropped out of the foreign language. The names of students dropping out were then stratified by language and level. Percentages of student drop outs in foreign language were computed from the number of students who were eligible to continue (i.e. had foreign language the previous year). This information is presented in Figures #2, #3, and #4 on the next page.

Figure #2: French Attrition Rates

FRENCH						
Year	7th Grade	8th Grade	Level I	Level II	Level III	Level IV
1987-88	37.3%	17.7%	29.9%	38.2%	49.1%	69.0%
1988-89	27.7%	14.6%	44.0%	43.8%	66.6%	67.8%
1989-90	35.4%	17.3%	44.1%	33.7%	60.0%	90.0%
1990-91	34.9%	14.7%	40.7%	33.0%	56.3%	78.6%
1991-92	32.2%	05.8%	24.3%	32.3%	26.2%	53.1%
1992-93	not available until fall, 1993					

Figure #3: German Attrition Rates 1987 - 1992

GERMAN						
Year	7th Grade	8th Grade	Level I	Level II	Level III	Level IV
1987-88	34.5%	10.5%	35.7%	31.0%	100%	N/A
1988-89	8.7%	31.6%	37.0%	50.0%	70%	N/A
1989-90	N/A	28.6%	77.8%	75.9%	58.8%	N/A
1990-91	N/A	N/A	56.5%	38.9%	63.0%	100%
1991-92	N/A	N/A	69.0%	85.7%	66.7%	100%
1992-93	not available until fall, 1993					

Figure #4: Spanish Attrition Rates 1987 - 1992

SPANISH						
Year	7th Grade	8th Grade	Level I	Level II	Level III	Level IV
1987-88	49.1%	17%	39.5%	47.0%	58.6%	82.3%
1988-89	46.0%	23.8%	27.6%	48.6%	66.7%	82.0%
1989-90	34.8%	15.8%	34.7%	55.0%	55.3%	54.5%
1990-91	32.7%	23.4%	25.0%	47.4%	48.6%	53.8%
1991-92	36.6%	09.6%	26.2%	19.0%	38.9%	61.1%
1992-93	not available until fall, 1993					

As one can see, the highest attrition rates, for all three languages, occurs consistently after the third level of high school foreign language study. Currently, most Michigan colleges and universities are requiring three years of a foreign language for either entrance to, or exit from, these universities. The high attrition rates at the end of the third level in the high school seems to suggest students are fulfilling that language requirement in high school and then dropping it as soon as they have. Results of the "Student Attitudes Surveys" (to be discussed later), particularly the section on "Reasons for Discontinuing Foreign Language Study" will be examined to see if this

assumption holds true.

Grand Blanc High School currently has a two year fine, performing, or practical arts graduation requirement. Foreign language falls under the fine arts portion of that requirement. While students are not required to take a foreign language to fulfill that requirement, many do. The attrition rates for all three languages (refer back to Figures #2, #3, and #4) are second highest at this level (see Level II). This seems to suggest that students who may not be planning to go to college take foreign language to fulfill the high school graduation requirement, then drop it once they have. This will also be examined further in the "Student Attitudes Survey" portion of this paper.

The lowest level of attrition occurs after the 8th grade level. Because students who take a foreign language for two years in the middle school can enter directly into the second level at the high school they must still take two years at the high school in order to fulfill their high school fine, performing or practical arts requirement. This may also contribute to the higher attrition rates at the third level.

In some years the attrition rate for a given language may be quite a bit different from other years (see French

Level I in Figure #2, for example). The 29.9% and 24.3% in years 1987-88 and 1991-92 respectively, are quite a bit lower than the 44.0%, 44.1%, and 40.7% in years 1988-89, 1989-90, and 1990-91. This difference is directly related to the staff member assigned to teach that particular level and is a problem this researcher is currently trying to get district administrators to address.

While the attrition rates vary according to staffing, another interesting finding is the decrease in attrition rates for French Level III (from 56.3% to 26.2%) and Spanish Level II (from 47.4% to 19.0%) in the past year. These two levels have been the focus of a change in teaching methodology/delivery. Teachers at these levels have been piloting an Outcomes Based Approach/Authentic Assessment model with, what appears to be, a high degree of success. This may also explain the recent increase in enrollment.

Now that we've examined the enrollment figures and attrition rates let's focus on the third aspect of this study--the reasons why students chose to discontinue their foreign language study.

Reasons Why Students Dropped Out of Foreign Language

In April, 1993 "Student Attitudes Surveys" were distributed to those students who were enrolled in a foreign language class in the Grand Blanc Community School district during the 1991-92 school year, but who did not continue their foreign language study in the 1992-93 school year. The results of these surveys follows.

Middle School Results

In 1992-93, 73 students who were eligible to continue their foreign language study chose not to. Of those 73 students eight have moved from the district, two were expelled for possessing a gun, three went to an alternative education program, and two were promoted to the high school (and will be included in high school results). Of the remaining 58 students, all received and completed the middle school version of the "Student Attitudes Survey".

Twenty-eight of the middle school respondees (48%) were male, while twenty-five were female (43%). Five others did not respond to that question. Forty-five of the 58 respondees (78%) identified themselves as caucasian, three identified themselves as African American (5%), two of the 58 (3%) were Native American, and eight of the 58 (14%)

Reasons (continued)

claimed to be of some other ethnicity.

All of the students surveyed are currently 8th grade students ranging in age from 13 to 16 years old with seventeen of them (29%) discontinuing their study of French, thirty-seven out of 58 (64%) dropped out of Spanish and four students (7%) did not respond.

In trying to ascertain whether or not the students' choices had been honored when being assigned to foreign language, students were asked if the foreign language they took was their first choice. Forty-seven (81%) said they had been given their first choice while eight (14%) said they had not. Three students (5%) did not respond to that question.

Because foreign language is often a requirement for entrance to and/or exit from college, we wanted to know if these students planned on going to college. Fifty of the 58 respondees (86%) said they did plan to attend college while three (5%) said they had no plans. Five students (9%) did not respond to that question.

When asked what was the highest level of school they planned on obtaining, three students (5%) said they only intended to get a high school diploma, two (3%) wanted 1 to 2 years of college, eleven intended to go to college for

2 to 4 years (19%), fifteen students (26%) felt they would earn a bachelor's degree, eleven intend to earn a master's degree (19%), thirteen plan to attend 7 or more years of college (22%), and three students (5%) do not know.

Beyond the demographical information students were also given a list of twenty-two possible reasons for discontinuing their foreign language study. They were asked to circle those reasons they felt applied to them (see Figure #5).

Figure 5: Middle School Reasons for Discontinuing Foreign Language Study

REASON	# OF RESPONSES	%
1. Didn't see use in real life.	19	33%
2. Teacher wouldn't recommend.	5	9%
3. Work was too hard.	23*	40%
4. Work was too easy.	1	2%
5. Teacher expected too much.	16	28%
6. Teacher expected too little.	0	0%
7. Wasn't doing well enough.	24*	41%
8. Not what I expected.	23*	40%
9. Don't see the need for it.	17	29%
10. It was hurting my grades.	20	34%
11. Other.	16	28%
12. Couldn't fit in my schedule.	8	14%
13. Wanted another class.	30*	52%
14. Switching languages.	3	5%
15. Wanted a class with my friends.	8	14%
16. Wanted more elective choices @ H.S.	12	21%
17. Not interested.	23*	40%
18. Learned all I wanted to.	7	12%
19. Skipping a year, then coming back.	26*	45%
20. Didn't get along with teacher.	12	21%
21. Didn't like amount of homework.	15	26%
22. Other, please specify.	11	19%

* indicates top 6 reasons

In this part of the survey, respondees were not to restrict themselves to any given number of reasons, only to circle those reasons they felt applied. As one can see in Figure #5 the top reason for discontinuing their foreign language study, given by 30 of the middle school respondees (52%), was that they had to choose between the foreign language and another class they also wanted. This seems to support the research of Myers, Bryant, Keyes, and Schwartz.

Going along with having to choose between the foreign language and another class they wanted, the second top reason why students chose to discontinue foreign language at that time was because they intended to skip a year and pick it back up. Twenty-six of the middle school students surveyed (45%) responded affirmatively to that statement.

Aside from having to choose and intending to "drop back in", the next most favored reason for discontinuing foreign language study was that students did not feel they were doing well enough in the language to continue. Twenty-four respondees (41%) expressed this concern.

Tying for fourth position and given by 23 of the respondees (40%) was the following: 1) it was too hard, 2) it was not what I expected and 3) not interested.

In the next part of the survey, when asked to narrow their reasons for discontinuing their foreign language study to the top three to five reasons, students responded similarly to when they were not given a restricted number (see Figure #6).

Figure 6: Top Three to Five Reasons Why Middle School Students Discontinue Foreign Language Study

	REASON	# of RESPONSES	%
1.	Not interested.	19	32%
2.	Work was too hard.	18	31%
3.	Plan to skip a year then pick it back up.	14	24%
3.	Wasn't doing well enough to continue.	14	24%
3.	Didn't see how I would use it in real life.	14	24%

Finishing first and given by nineteen of the respondees (32%) was, "I was not interested in taking more." Finishing a close second and given by eighteen of the respondees (31%) was a feeling that the work was too hard.

Tying for the third position and given by fourteen of the respondees (24%) were two items of the top items mentioned when student choice was unrestricted. They were the feeling that they were "not doing well enough to continue" and "skipping a year then coming back to it."

Interestingly enough, and also tied for third place, but not in the top six (when students were given the freedom to choose as many reasons as they wanted) was the response, "I didn't see how I would use the foreign language in real life."

High School

At the high school level, 239 students were identified as having chosen to discontinue their foreign language study in 1992-93 after having been enrolled in the previous year. Of the 239 students, twenty-two of them (9%) moved from the district, eight (7%) have either quit school, been withdrawn truant, or were expelled. Four students (4%) are now attending Mott Middle College, twenty-nine (26%) graduated, six of them (5%) were exchange students only here for one year, and twelve students changed their schedule within the first week of school indicating a mistake had been made in scheduling.

High School (continued)

After excluding the graduates, exchange students, moves, drop-outs, and alternative education students, 158 students of the original 239 remained eligible to be a part of the study. Like at the Middle School, students were asked to report to a common survey location where the principal and counselors would administer the survey. The only difference, however, was that teachers were given the option as to whether or not they wished to allow that individual to leave class. This was done primarily because of the high number of classroom interruptions that had already taken place during the year. This resulted in 113 completed surveys being received (72%) out of the possible 158.

Out of the 113 completed surveys fifty-six were male (50%), forty-six were female (41%), and eleven (10%) chose not to respond. Their ages ranged from 14 to 19 with two students (2%) being 14, eight students (7%) claimed they were 15 years old, thirty-seven (33%) were 16 years old, thirty-three (29%) were 17, twenty-one (19%) were 18 years old, and one student said he/she was 19 years old. Two students did not respond.

With regard to ethnicity, ninety out of the 113 respondees (80%) were caucasian, five (4%) were African American,

High School (continued)

one was native American, one was Hispanic, two were Asian/Pacific, and fourteen chose not to respond to this optional question.

When asked what year in high school they were, five out of the 113 (4%) were freshmen, twenty-six said they were sophomores (23%), thirty-five indicated they were juniors (31%), and thirty-six were seniors (32%). There were eleven students (10%) who failed to respond to this question.

When asked what kind of grades they got, twenty-six (23%) said their grade point average fell between a 3.5 and 4.0. Twenty-five students (22%) claimed their g.p.a. fell in the 3.0 to 3.4 range, while another twenty-five (22%) claimed the 2.5 to 2.9 range. Sixteen students' g.p.a.'s (14%) fell in the 2.0 to 2.4 range, nine (8%) in the 1.5 to 1.9 range, and only one student admitted to having a g.p.a. lower than 1.5. There were also eleven students (10%) who did not respond.

When questioned about which language they dropped, forty students out of the 113 students (35%) abandoned French, twenty-two (19%) discontinued German, and thirty-seven (33%) chose not to continue Spanish. Fourteen students (12%) did not respond.

High School (continued)

Ninety-five of the 113 students (84%) felt they had been given their first foreign language choice, seven (6%) felt they had not been, and eleven students (10%) did not respond.

When asked about their future plans, particularly with regard to college, ninety-seven respondees (86%) said they planned to go to college, five students (4%) did not plan to go to college, and eleven (10%) did not respond. Of those planning to go to college, two (2%) planned to attend for 1 to 2 years, eight (7%) planned to go from 2 to 4 years, thirty-three (29%) hoped to obtain a bachelor's degree, forty (35%) aspired to earn a master's degree, fourteen (12%) desire attending college for 7 to 8 years, and fifteen (13%) were uncertain.

Just as in the middle school survey, high school students were also asked to cite reasons why they chose to discontinue their foreign language study. Rather than the twenty-two reasons provided for middle school, high school students were given a list of twenty-six reasons. Students were given instructions to circle as many reasons that applied (see Figure #7: Reasons for Discontinuing Foreign Language Study on next page).

Figure #6: High School Reasons for Discontinuing Foreign Language Study

REASON	# OF RESPONSES	%
1. Didn't see use in real life.	23	21%
2. Teacher wouldn't recommend.	1	.009%
3. Work was too hard.	15	13%
4. Work was too easy.	10	9%
5. Teacher expected too much.	13	12%
6. Teacher expected too little.	5	4%
7. Wasn't doing well enough.	25	22%
8. Not what I expected.	21	19%
9. Don't see the need for it.	20	18%
10. Other	27*	24%**
11. Wanted another class.	46*	41%
12. Switching languages.	4	4%
13. Wanted class with friends.	4	4%
14. Interfered with Skill Center.	4	4%
15. Interfered with advanced electives.	11	10%
16. Interfered with A.P. classes	6	5%
17. Fulfilled high school requirement	29*	26%
18. Fulfilled college requirement	38*	34%
19. Not interested.	52*	46%
20. Learned all I wanted to.	11	10%
21. Skipping a year.	12	11%
22. Didn't get along with teacher.	16	14%
23. Didn't like amount of homework.	13	12%
24. Too much work with other classes.	15	13%
25. Hurting GPA	18	16%
26. Other, please specify.	27*	24%**

* Indicates top 6 reasons

** other responses were sorted by category for inclusion in the Top 3 to 5 answers in Figure #8.

When given the opportunity to give an unlimited number of reasons for discontinuing their foreign language study, the top reason high school students gave was "they were no longer interested in taking it." Fifty-two students or 46% of the respondees gave this as a response. The next most frequently given reason was "there was another class they wanted to take." Forty-six respondees or 41% cited that reason.

Fulfilling college requirements finished in the third spot with thirty-eight of the students (34%) citing this answer. Not surprising just behind that with twenty-nine responses (26%) was "fulfilled high school requirements." This does seem to explain the higher attrition rates at the second and third levels.

When asked to limit their reasons to the top three to five reasons, (see Figure #8 below) "not interested" captured the top spot with thirty-two responses (28%), "had to choose between foreign language and another class" and "the work/teacher was too hard/expected too much" tied for the number two spot with twenty-eight responses (25%) each. Finishing next was the high school/college requirement issue garnering twenty responses (18%), and finally, "did not get along with the teacher" finished in the number five position with fifteen responses or 13%. Interestingly,

eleven out of the 15 on this topic came from students taking German.

Figure 8: Top Three to Five Reasons Why High School Students Discontinue Foreign Language Study

	REASON	# of RESPONSES	%
1.	Not interested.	32	28%
2.	Had to chose between another class.	28	25%
2.	Work/Teacher was too hard/expected too much.	28	25%
3.	Fulfilled high school/ college requirements.	20	18%
4.	Didn't not get along with teacher.	15*	13%

* 11 out of 15 respondees cited German teacher.

Collectively, we now know students in the Grand Blanc Community School district dropped their foreign language study because they were either "not interested", "had to choose between another class", found the "work/teacher to be too hard", or "fulfilled their high school or college requirement". As valuable as this data is, the original proposal called for this information to be broken down by language and level. Unfortunately, the changeover in administration, and the modifications that had to be made in order to gain acceptance by the new administrators, reduced the sample. When stratified by language and level, the largest sub sample became sixteen students, the smallest two. This researcher felt these numbers were inadequate for producing reliable results.

When next year's group of "drop-outs" is surveyed they too will be stratified by language and level and, perhaps, will provide sufficient numbers for analysis.

V. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

This study set out to examine the enrollment trends, attrition rates, and reasons for discontinuing foreign language study as it pertains to the Grand Blanc Community School district. What have we learned as a result of this study? We have learned that enrollments in foreign

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS (continued)

languages in the Grand Blanc Community School district while falling in the late 1980's had been rising steadily since that time. We have also seen Grand Blanc introduce an elementary foreign language program--increasing even further the percentage of students now enrolled in foreign language within the district.

With regard to attrition, we have seen the highest levels of attrition occurring after the second and third year the high school level. We have also seen that lowest attrition rates occur at the end of the 8th grade level. We learned that the attrition rate can vary greatly each year according to the staff member assigned to teach a particular level, and, we have also learned that the introduction of an Outcomes Based approach has been successful.

As for the reasons why students drop out of foreign languag--we found out that middle school students dropped out primarily because they had to chose between foreign language and another class but, had plans to return the next year. We also learned middle school students dropped out if they felt they were not doing well enough to continue or if they felt the work was too hard and not what they expected.

SUMMARY & CONCLUSIONS (continued)

The reasons why high school students dropped out of a foreign language, we learned, was they were no longer interested in taking it, or because there was another class they wanted to take or, they had fulfilled their high school and/or college requirements. A large number of high school students also felt that work and/or teacher was too hard and expected too much from them.

Will this information help the foreign language department pinpoint areas and/or develop strategies for improvement? My guess is yes. If nothing more, we now have an idea as to where to begin to focus any future efforts. We know students are not interested in taking a foreign language but we do not know exactly why yet. We also know students think we expect too much work--perhaps we should reexamine our program goals, the speed at which items are covered, or the methods in which instruction is delivered. Or, maybe, we should examine students' expectations with regard to foreign languages prior to their entrance into the program so a better match can be made.

One thing is certain, change is necessary. Our students are telling us this, the state of Michigan, with its Core Curriculum is telling us this, various studies,

SUMMARY & CONCLUSIONS (continued)

national commissions, and business leaders are telling us all we must change in order to compete in the increasingly interdependent, world markets. We have a direction, we know there will be drop outs next year, we need to act now.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

GRAND BLANC MIDDLE SCHOOL

STUDENTS ATTITUDES SURVEY

1992 - 1993

This survey is intended for Grand Blanc Middle School students who were once in a foreiggn language class but who have chosen not to continue studying that language.

It is important that you answer all questions carefully and honestly as the information gathered as a result of this survey will be used to help improve the foreign language classes.

This is your chance to make a difference.

BACKGROUND DATA: Circle the appropriate response.

1. What gender are you?

   a. Male b. Female

2. What is your current age?

   a. 12 d. 15 ac. 18
   b. 13 e. 16 ad. 19
   c. 14 ab. 17

3. What ethnic background are you? (optional)

   a. Black d. Hispanic
   b. White e. Asian
   c. Native America ab. Other

4. What grade are you currently in?

   a. 6th Grade d. 9th Grade
   b. 7thGrade
   c. 8th Grade

5. Circle the category below that BEST describes the grades you get.

a. All A's
b. A's & B's
c. A's & B's, some C's
d. C's
e. C's & D's
ab. D's
ac. D's & E's

6. What foreign language were you enrolled in?

a. French
b. German
c. Japanese
d. Spanish

7. Was the foreign language you took your first choice?

a. Yes
b. No

8. Are you planning to go to college?

a. Yes
b. No

9. What is the highest level of schooling you plan on taking?

a. High School diploma
b. 1 to 2 years of college
c. 2 to 4 years of college
d. Bachelor's degree (4 years of college & required for most occupations)
e. 5 to 6 years of college (usually a Master's degree)
ab. 7 to 8 years of college (Doctor's, Lawyers)
ac. Other

REASONS FOR DISCONTINUING YOUR FOREIGN LANGUAGE STUDY - Listed below are reasons students often give for not continuing their foreign language study. Circle those that describe you.

Expectations

1. I didn't see how I would use the foreign language in real life.
2. The teacher would not refcommend me to continue.
3. The work was too hard/challenging.
4. The work was too easy/not challending.
5. The teacher expected too much work.
6. The teacher expected too little work.
7. I wasn't doing well enough to continue.
8. It was not what I expected.
9. I don't see a need for taking a foreign language.
10. It was hurting my middle school grades too much.
11. Other

Scheduling

12. I couldn't fit foreign language into my schedule because of the required classes.
13. I had to choose between foreign language and another class I also wanted.
14. I'm switching to another foreign language.
15. I wanted a class with my friends.
16. I want to get my foreign language out of the way so I will have more elective choices in high school.

OTHER

17. I was not interested in taking more.

18. I've learned all I wanted to.

19. I'm going to skip a year then pick it back up.

20. I didn't get along with the teacher.

21. I didn't like the amount of homework that I had to do.

22. Other, please specify _____

SUMMARY

Of those reasons that you circled above (and on the previous pages)--list the top 3 to 5 reasons why you discontinued your foreign language study.

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

APPENDIX B:

GRAND BLANC HIGH SCHOOL
STUDENTS ATTITUDES SURVEY
1992 - 1993

This survey is intended for Grand Blanc High School students who were once in a foreign language class but who have chosen not to continue studying that language.

It is important that you answer all questions carefully and honestly as the information gathered as a result of this survey will be used to help improve the foreign language classes.

This is your chance to make a difference.

BACKGROUND DATA: Circle the appropriate response.

1. What gender are you?

   a. Male b. Female

2. What is your current age?

   a. 12 d. 15 ac. 18
   b. 13 e. 16 ad. 19
   c. 14 ab. 17

3. What ethnic background are you? (optional)

   a. Black d. Hispanic
   b. White e. Asian
   c. Native American ab. Other

4. What is your current class standing?

   a. Freshman d. Senior
   b. Sophomore e. Graduate
   c. Junior

5. Circle the category beloew that BEST describes your current grade point average.

a. 3.5 to 4.0
b. 3.0 to 3.4
c. 2.5 to 2.9
d. 2.0 to 2.4
e. 1.5 to 1.9
ab. 1.0 to 1.4
ac. 0.0 to 0.9

6. What foreign language were you enrolled in?

a. French
b. German
c. Japanese
d. Spanish

7. Was the foreign language you took your first choice?

a. Yes
b. No

8. Are you planning to go to college?

a. Yes
b. No

9. What is the highest level of schooling you plan on taking?

a. High School diploma
b. 1 to 2 years of college
c. 2 to 4 years of college
d. Bachelor's degree (4 years of college & required for most occupations)
e. 5 to 6 years of college (usually a Master's degree)
ab. 7 to 8 years of college (Doctor's, Lawyers)
ac. Other

REASONS FOR DISCONTINUING YOUR FOREIGN LANGUAGE STUDY - Listed below are reasons students often give for not continuing their foreign language study. Circle those that describe you.

Expectations

1. I didn't see how I would use the foreign language in real life.
2. The teacher would not recommend me to continue.
3. The work was too hard/challenging.
4. The work was too easy/not challending.
5. The teacher expected too much work.
6. The teacher expected too little work.
7. I wasn't doing well enough to continue.
8. It was not what I expected.
9. I don't see a need for taking a foreign language.
10. Other reasons.

Scheduling

11. I had to choose between foreign language and another class I also wanted.
12. I'm switching to another foreign language.
13. I wanted a class with my friends.
14. It interfered with Skill Center.
15. It interfered with advanced level classes in other departments.
16. I had to choose between 1 advanced class (i.e. Calculus, AP English, etc.) and to continue the foreign language.

REQUIREMENTS

17. I took the foreign language to fulfill Grand Blanc High School's 2 year fine/ performing and/or practical arts graduation requirement and now I'm done.

18. I fulfilled the recommended number of years for college admission.

OTHER

19. I was not interested in taking more.

20. I've learned all I wanted to.

21. I'm going to skip a year then pick it back up.

22. I didn't get along with the teacher.

23. I didn't like the amount of homework that I had to do.

24. There was too much work with my other classes.

25. It was hurting my high school grade point average.

26. Other, please specify _____

SUMMARY

Of those reasons that you circled above (and on the previous pages)--list the top 3 to 5 reasons why you discontinued your foreign language study.

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____